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Jane Little Rowley

SONGS,

&c.

LONDON:
Printed by WILSON AND OGILVY,
57, Skinner Street, Snowhill.

SONGS

OF

FEAST, FIELD, AND FRAY.

BY

Λ.

LONDON

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.

1853.

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P R E F A C E.

It seems generally expected, that, however else an author may fail in his duties to the public, he should, at least, apologize for the imperfections of a maiden effort. I dare not violate a custom so venerable in its antiquity, though what follows may scarcely be worth an exordium. For "Decius" I must especially claim clemency; few could hope to follow in the path already trodden by Macaulay without paying the penalty of their rashness. I have not attempted to imbue my production with that classical unity of tone, through which his stand pre-eminently alone; the imitation if in the least successful must have been unpardonably servile; so that I must bear the blame of having re-cast in the mould of a modern

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ballad, what may have been said and done in Ancient Rome.

Many will agree with me in thinking that the hunting-songs hitherto published are generally deficient in that elevation and energy which ought to distinguish the annals of a pursuit, ever the favourite of "princes, potentates, and peers," since "The Mighty Hunter" founded his dynasty in Assyria. My endeavour has been to raise some old Legends of the chase to the level of ordinary lyric poetry: if I could have breathed into them some of my own enthusiasm for "The Noble Science," I think I should not have succeeded ill.

As it is, my readers will hardly derive half the amusement from these sketches that I felt in scribbling them long ago. The graver avocations of practical life leave one little leisure for "the labour of the file." Abstracts of Title and the Laws of Real Property interfere sadly with the Abstractions of Sentiment and the pursuit of the Ideal. So I must meet my judges "with all my imperfections on my head;" I cannot hope that they will be so lenient as those who counselled this plunge

into publicity. Perhaps, after all, my best chance is, that the lightness of the *matériel* may disarm severity of criticism.

LINCOLN'S INN :

March 1853.

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POEMS.

NYMPHOLEPTES.

It was currently believed by the ancients, that any mortal encountering one of the “Nymphs,” or wood-spirits, was thenceforth stricken with insanity, and such persons were called *Νυμφολήπται*.

I REMEMBER the summer morning—
 (It must have been long ago,
For locks like winter’s night, since then,
 Are blanch’d to winter’s snow—)
When I went forth on Erymanth,
 To the hunting of the roe.

The chace was long, and the winding glades
 Of those upland woods are steep,
So, just where under an elm and a yew
 Bright threads of water creep,
Wearied and heated, at high noontide,
 I laid me down to sleep.

At even I woke : no sudden sound
 Made nerve and marrow thrill ;
'Twas the dead silence of the woods,
 The hush of the murm'ring rill ;
I felt there was something ghostly near,
 The air was so very still.

Then I saw, thro' mists, coming, some from sleep,
 Some from the rising dew,
Just where the lengthening shadows fell
 From the trunks of elm and yew,
A white hand, parting the wild vines,
 And a sweet face peeping through.

As the boughs gave way, a stately form,
 In sylvan garb, stood there,
The small foot shod with a dun-deer's hide,
 The lithe arms gleaming bare,
A girdle of gold round her slender waist,
 And a heron's plume in her hair.

She masqu'd it well ! one only sign
Of the present Goddess told ;
You could not look in her wondrous eyes,
And deem her of earthly mould,
Ev'n when they melted in love—yet less
When they glitter'd stern and cold.

Yet I sprang to meet her fearlessly,
When I saw a strange look rise,
That half allur'd, and half repell'd,
From the depths of the violet eyes,
Half woman-like, and half divine,
Half anger, and half surprise.

The glamour of that earnest look
Repress'd mine impulse wild,
And held me pris'ner where I stood,
Meek, as a chidden child ;
'Till thro' each vein flow'd fire again,
As the fatal vision smil'd.

The rest is darkness—in my breast
The treasur'd secret lies ;
For Eros, like his brother-gods,
Hath his own mysteries ;
Th' Initiate pays a heavy price ;
And whoso speaks them, dies.

Away ! I must not think on them,
Or my brain would whirl and reel ;
The wild woods dare not whisper them,
The winds will not reveal ;
And on the lips that *could* have told,
She set her own sweet seal.

At dawning I woke—the wavelets spoke
In their old murm'ring tone ;
There was a rustle in the leaves,
That last night's breeze had strown ;
Or ever I rais'd my heavy eyes,
I knew that I was alone.

As I sought thee thro' that weary day,
I have sought thee since, in vain;
False love, but unforgotten! say,
Will they never come again,
Those hours of brief and fiery joys,
Y-bought by years of pain?

I have kept troth—for thee I spurn'd
Mine own affianc'd bride;
'Twas an off'ring worthy of thy shrine,
And of an Oread's⁽¹⁾ pride,
When, desp'rate in her slighted love,
Arcadia's fairest died.

I have sought thee when the earth was gay
With garlands of her Prime,
And when my matted locks were moist
With hoar frost's clinging rime;
But winter and spring come alike to me,
I hold no count of time.

The forest knows our secret—

For herds of grazing deer

Gaze earnestly, but never fly,

When my heedless steps draw near ;

And I see the grey wolf and her cubs

Crouch, as I pass, in fear :

Of, too, at dead of night, I wake,

Rous'd by an Evian⁽²⁾ cry,

While, with loose tresses ivy-crown'd,

And thyrsi tost on high,

At the mouth of my cave, like a rushing wave,

The Mænads hurry by.

Tho' fierce and fatal be their wrath,

To mortals who cross their way,

In ruth or dread those wild eyes melt

When near their haunts *I* stray ;

For they whisper that when the fit comes on,

I am madder far than they.

It may well be so—for when winds are low,
And moon and stars ride high,
I think—“so it was on our bridal night ;”
And at that weird memory,
The farthest glades of Erymanth
Echo my desperate cry.

But I wis these wanderings soon must end,
I am growing feebler now ;
Save when I think on Her, my pulse
Beats languidly and slow :
If I could but worship at Her feet
Once more, before I go !

She would hardly trace the form and faee
She once call'd very fair ;
But there is not a furrow on Her cheek,
Nor a silver line in Her hair ;
The cycles of Eternity
Will leave no shadow there.

To the woods once more ! tho' the leaves be sere,
And the North-wind breatheth rain—
Perehancee compassion at the last
Shall vanquish long disdain,
And Love twine myrtle-wreaths for Death,
That Life *but once* could gain.

It is the wildest of my dreams—
And yet—such things might be—
Thro' mists that girdle Hades' verge,
What if mine eyes should see
Th' immortal light in Her's grow dim
With tear-drops shed for me !

Then ten-fold were I overpaid,
If She hath done me wrong—
No word of murmur or reproach
Should linger on my tongue—
Not ev'n my heart should whisper,
“Love, thou hast tarried long !”

Now, listen all ! to whom these words

Distemper'd ravings seem :

My days have troubled been, and dark,

Save for one dazzling gleam ;

Yet, I would not have chang'd for the Real of life,

Th' Idea of my golden dream !

THE RELIQUAIRE.

SEEST thou yon casket wrought in gold
And imagery fair?
Mine ancestor brought, from an altar he spoil'd,
That costly reliquaire.

The riches were reft from the charnel-house
That it boasted in days of eld,
And princes before it have bent the knee,
As they worshipp'd the bones it held.

But *I* have found a lighter use
For the locks of my fairy shrine;
They guard the reliques of buried loves,
Of hearts that I dreamt were mine;

And I would not change those treasures
For every canoniz'd bone
Of the maiden myriad, ⁽³⁾ who died
In the city of grey Cologne.

For when that casket I unclose,
Old thoughts will sometimes rise,
A strange glow rises in my breast,
Strange moisture dims mine eyes.

A life-like softness melts my heart,
Long dead to hopes and fears ;
Is it because they once were wet
With streams of pleasant tears,—
That still *some* fairy-rings ⁽⁴⁾ are green
In the waste of bygone years ?

That white glove held a whiter hand,
When hand and heart were free ;
There's a ring on the slender finger now
That was never put on by me.

I remember *who* gather'd and gave that rose,
At the break of a summer morn ;
From her life and her flower the blossom hath dropt,
There is nothing left but the thorn.

When I won that turquoise clasp, for me
Earth held no richer prize,
And it's now ten years since I forgot
The colour of her eyes.

Yes! all these tokens emblem well
The vows, soon made and broken,
When the morrow brought forgetfulness
Of all last night had spoken.

I have a relique far more dear,
A treasure far more rare,
Nay—you must not seek it in the heap
Of trifles mingling there ;—
It could tell the story of my life,
This tress of long fair hair :

For many years it hath not left
The shelter of my breast,
And it will share my grave with me,
When mine hour shall come for rest :

It was not begg'd with flatt'ring words,
Nor, with feign'd coyness, given ;
But shorn from the coffin'd head of One
Long-time a saint in Heaven :

It was in the spring-tide of our bliss,
(For she had scarcely known
One-half how fondly she was lov'd),
When God took back His own.

My lips to plead my Fancy's cause
Were all too apt before,
But, since my morning-star was quench'd,
I have never trifled more.

For ev'n if I *could* woo again,
Think'st thou that I could dare,
While at matins and at even-song
I turn towards Heaven in prayer,
To bring a cloud on the radiant brow
Of the brightest angel there ?

No ! all unscath'd, I wander on
By sweet smiles and soft eyes ;
The Talisman upon my heart
Mocks all their witcheries ;

Each glance of fire is glinted back
Like the moon from a frozen sea ;
Fairer than all earth's loveliest,
Is my buried love to me !

“IT IS NOT GOOD THAT MAN SHOULD BE
ALONE.”

THOU’RT happy now, my first, last love !
For thy pure soul hath gone
Where saint and seraph vigil keep,
Before the Sapphire throne.

We felt how lovely Death may be,
As we saw thee pass away :
So calmly broke the dawning
Of thine eternal day,

That the Sea of Light, beyond the stars,
On thy path its radiance shed,
And wings of angels pillowed thee
Long ere we thought thee dead.

Tongue may not tell, nor heart conceive,
 What joys surround thee there,
 But, between me and thy glories, falls
 The veil of my despair.

Earth holds no fair or graceful thing,
 For man to hear or see,
 But its presence brings a sharper pang,
 With a memory of thee :

Softly and sadly glance the stars,
 Like thy deep earnest eyes,
 Each strain of melody brings back
 The tones of thy replies ;

The sweetest flowers that summer weaves
 Into her crown of pride
 Recall the brightness of thy cheek
 Before its blossom died

And I shrink away from friends, like foes,
To nurse my grief apart,
While the sense of loneliness still lies
Like a dead hand on my heart.

I remember thou didst whisper
Of light beyond the gloom :
Alas ! the night is very dark,
And the dawn hath never come ;

For when we talk'd of meeting,
Mine own ! we did not know,
These weary hours of widowhood
How heavily they go !

Thy latest vow went up to God,
For lightening of my pain ;
I thought not prayer of thine could be
So wholly breath'd in vain.

Yet I would not that one thought of me,
To sadden thee, should rise ;
For it fitteth not that mortal woes
Should dim immortal eyes.

Murmur is sin, whatever be
The utter'd will of Heaven ;
But, if pain as penance may suffice,
Mine error is forgiven !

THE ELOPEMENT.

WE were not wedded at high noontide,
By kith and kin surrounded;
The chime of the Cathedral bells
For our bridal never sounded.

But at midnight, by one cresset's light,
The rites were mutter'd o'er;
Their witness was the burly squire,
Whose broad-sword kept the door.

We did not tarry for marriage-feast,
Nor even, "Adieu!" to say;
And scarce the benison was done,
Ere we sped on our way.

Hast thou forgot, sweet wife of mine !
 (Tho' 'tis twice ten years ago),
How lightly pass'd those hours of flight
 While my good steed bore us on,

Thy slight form nestling in my cloak,
 Thine arm around me twin'd,
The black night with its stars before,
 And thy father's spears behind ?

Hast thou forgot the rugged pass,
 Where, when true Roland fell,
The hunters found the hart at bay,
 At the narrowing of the dell ?

Scarce had I time, with a long kiss,
 To hush thy whisper'd fears,—
Scarce time to wind my bugle thrice,
 When the glen grew bright with spears.

“Crouch down beneath yon crag,” I said,
“And give me space to wield my blade,—
“We’ll win it yet, be not afraid,
“If so the saints should please :
“They can but reach me one by one,
“And we kept the breach at Ascalon
“Against heavier odds than these.”

Thro’ mailèd glove, I felt thy hand
Give eloquent reply :
And calm as death, with up-turn’d brow,
Set lips, and stedfast eye,
Didst thou wait the strife, like a soldier’s wife,
Shudd’ring, but silently.

There was one, six lances-length in front,
Who led the foemen on :
I knew my rival’s form right well,
Tho’ his vizor-clasp was down.

When thy stern father spurn'd my suit,
 He stood and laugh'd the while ;
But Fortune made us even now,
For to my knee he bent him low,
 And 'twas my turn to smile.

He had vow'd, they say, to win thee back,
 Or die, ere the morrow morn ;
And the notch that my sword must still retain,
Since its edge clove sheer thro' helm and brain,
 Voucheth him not forsworn.

But they press'd me hard—I scarce bore up,
 Tho' I knew that help was near ;
And when my troopers clear'd the glen,
 I never heard their cheer ;

For from side, and arm, and brow, the blood
 Pour'd fast as winter's rain :
By Mary ! three short minutes more,
 And they had charg'd in vain !

Nay, never tremble! thrice such wounds
Would I blithely bear again,
From the languor of a death-like trance
To wake, as I did then;

My head upon thy breast, my cheek
Wet with thy tender tears,
And the plaintive music of thy voice
The first sound in mine ears!

Oh! hardly won, and dearly lov'd!
Tho' dark our marriage morning,
Hath not the day been calm and bright
That sprung from such wild dawning?

CHARADE.

WHERE words are spoken that friendship chill,
Like drops of freezing rain,
When hearts, long one, are rent apart,
Never to knit again,
In an hour remember'd, all too well,
Thro' after-years of pain ;

Where men fall fast as wither'd leaves,
Where hurtling deathbolts fly,
And iron hoof, with shivering spear,
Makes fearful symphony,
While over the din of shot and steel
Rings out the " Gathering cry ;"

Wherever wrath, or pain, or hate,
 Mar God's creation fair,
 In senate, mart, or battle-field,
 Be sure, my *First* is there !

A mariner paced the storm-toss'd deck,
 With a dark and anxious brow ;
 There was not a saint in Heaven to whom
 He did not make his vow,
 And pray them, if erst he had deek'd their shrines,
 At his need, to aid him now :

The night winds bore his prayer aloft,
 And, as the dawn broke clear,
 Forgot were all the tedious hours
 Of danger, toil, and fear,
 As, from twenty throats, the joyous shout
 Of my *Second* met his ear.

They say that a thousand islands crown
The Sea-Queen's forehead fair,
That she wreaths the night of her flowing locks
With those jewels rich and rare ;
Yet, bright as her sister-gems may be,
My *Third* is the brightest there.

Yes, all the riches my *Second* can boast,
My *Third* for her dower may claim ;
Alas ! that one failing still should blot
The glories of such a name ;
Alas ! that the hearts so warm in Love
My *First* should, so soon, inflame

THE MESS-SONG OF "THE 7TH."

I PASS'D my prime in the old war-time,
Some two-score years ago,
Then eyes were bright, and limbs were light,
That are dim and palsied now :
And the brightest space that thought can trace,
Thro' the vista of past years,
Is that reckless life of revel and strife
I led with the Fusileers.

Not a battle-plain in France or Spain
But saw our standards fly,
And not a name those ensigns claim
But speaks of a victory :
Whoever they were, that the charge would dare,
Lancers or Cuirassiers,
Their dead could tell if levell'd well
Was the fire of the Fusileers.

But we tam'd our pride, by beauty's side,
When our weary wars were done ;
The wily moves of whisper'd loves,
We knew them every one :
Oh ! it pass'd too soon, that April noon
Of smiles, and storms, and tears,
When "All is fair, in love or war,"
Was the word of the Fusileers.

Remember now, in that gay time, how
The midnights used to pass,
When the claret ran, and never a man
Had dar'd to flinch his glass :
And fill it up, this parting cup,
With one of our ancient cheers,
While we drink, the boast of England's host,
"The fighting Fusileers !"

THE EVE OF BATTLE.

THE PRESIDENT'S TOAST.

STILL rally round me, comrades mine,
We will not part so soon,
Tho' the dawning brings us work to do,
And the night has pass'd its noon.

We've revels that last from the sunset gun
To the first réveillé call;
But the feast that comes before the fight
Is fairly worth them all.

Not thro' the brain, but in the heart,
These brimming beakers glow,
Till each warms kindly to its friend,
And hardens to its foe.

So for *this* toast a minute's "law"

From the waning moon we'll borrow :
Here's "A clear course, a willing horse,
"And a heavy hand to-morrow!"

For some, too, gentler thoughts may rise
That I may not dare to blame ;
Thro' all the morning of my life,
Were not *my* dreams the same ?

They breathe a fragrance soft, tho' faint,
As that of wither'd flowers,
Dim memories of earnest eyes
That have met the stars with ours !

Bent brow—moist cheek—I like them well,
For I know, by that same sign,
Whose lip the blithest smile will wear
When we form to charge in line.

Yet fill again! regret is vain,
The time's too short for sorrow :
Here's "A clear course, a willing horse,
"And a heavy hand to-morrow!"

My voice has grown too harsh and loud
For the ear of lady fair ;
They suit not well with ball and bower,
Deep scars and grizzled hair ;

Life's path grows lonelier ev'ry day,
For my kindred now are few ;
Old friends drop off, like autumn leaves,
And I care not to make new ;

But, thro' the sunshine and the storm,
Still faithful, to my side
She cleaveth, whom the German sung,
The soldier's "Iron Bride."⁽⁵⁾

I have toasted all your ladye-loves,
Whether widow, wife, or maid ;
Now, do me right, and drink to mine,
The blue Damascene blade !

This once fill high, and drain it dry,
And now, come joy or sorrow,
Here's "A clear course, a willing horse,
And a heavy hand to-morrow !"

THE LOVER'S LEAP.

“ QUID FÆMINA POSSIT,”

A Legend of “The Atherstone.”

WELL! tho' I love not boasting,
Sith all will have it so,
You shall hear how we left the field behind,
A score of years ago.

Time will unclasp his fetters,
And age grow young once more,
When we think of all that was dared and done,
In the mad days of yore.

Close to my side ! sweet wife of mine !—

I will not have you frown ;

To the eloquence of those dark eyes

I owe that high renown.

But, first, fill up another cup,

Till o'er the mantled brim,

Sweet as the dew of a red ripe lip,

The glitt'ring bubbles swim ;

“ To the loving and the lov'd,” we'll drink,

“ The frank, the kind, the bold ;

“ To all warm living hearts, and those

“ That never till death were cold.”

'Twas a dull November morning,

South wind, and cloudy sky,

When, if ever scent could aid us,

A fox was doom'd to die ;

We met at Bolton Thicket,
That seldom blank was drawn ;—
Fresh lies the scene before me now,
As it were but yester-morn ;

Ten acres of copse, on a gentle slope,
By a belt of gorse surrounded ;
All grass, as far as the eye could reach,
By the line of blue hills bounded.

That day I mounted Thunderbolt,
Of black Prunella's breed,
Who, thro' toil and peril, never yet
Had fail'd me at my need ;—
With strength for the deep, and wind for the
down,
And a racing "turn of speed."

Ere long a challenge and a cheer
Came floating down the wind,
'Twas Mermaid's note, and the huntsman's voice,
We knew it was a find.

Together swept the scatter'd pack,
Like falcons to their prey,
Scarce had we gather'd up our reins,
When we heard the "Gone away!"

The dull air woke, as from a trance,
As sixty hounds gave chorus;
And away we went, with a stout dog-fox
Not a furlong's length before us.

Quivering in every limb, my steed
Toss'd high his raven crest ;
The crowd gave way, on either side,
As thro' their ranks we press'd,
'Till we took the place that was ours by right,
And led the van of the foremost flight,
Six lengths before the rest.

The sound or the sight of the gallant chase
Makes my blood boil—even now,
And *this* was when the tide of youth
Ran foaming at its flow ;
No trifle, in those merry days,
Turn'd me and my peers, I trow !

Yet a shudder, near akin to fear,
Thro' my very marrow crept,
When I saw a fence, that cross'd our line,
As down the hill we swept ;

And well the firmest cheek might blanch,
The sternest courage fail,
At the bullfinch, with its yawning drain,
A deep drop into a stony lane,
And a four-foot oaken rail.

Each look'd on each, 'till thus spoke out
The best of all our band,
A veteran of war and chase,
Who rode at my right-hand.

“ The churl who yonder ‘man-trap’ laid,
“ By an ill death may he fall!—
“ If the fox has headed across the road,
“ Good faith! he has foil'd us all.

“ For a tougher brush it were to face
“ Yon black-thorn's venom'd spears,
“ Than ever we had, in the olden time,
“ With Kellermann's Cuirassiers.”

Meanwhile, not far below us,
A crowd of gazers stood,
Whose eyes had never left us
Since we broke from Bolton Wood.

The best blood of two counties
Made up that bright array,
And there my queenlike Ladye-love
Rein'd in her fiery grey.

Hither and thither rode the field,
Seeking an easier place ;
I, too, had turn'd me, when I met
My Mistress face to face :

And I bounded in my seat, like one
Death-stricken thro' the brain,—
Sweet wife ! the bliss of after years
Scarce paid that instant's pain :

There was scorn upon her curling lip,
In her dark eyes angry flame,
On the marble of her polish'd brow
Red rose the flush of shame ;

It had made the veriest dastard brave
What spoke that glance from her,
And, with a madman's shout, I gave
My good steed rein and spur :

A snort of wrath from Thunderbolt
Answer'd my desp'rate cry,
The blood gouts dropp'd from his dusky sides,
Like rain from a low'ring sky,
And I felt, as I rush'd him at the fence,
He was as wild as I :

Then came, too late, a warning shriek,
And, then, such crackling sound
As echoes thro' a burning house,
When th' beams are splint'ring round ;

But, o'er crash and cry, rose clear and high,
The voice well loved and known,
With clarion note and silv'ry thrill,—
“ Oh, Charlie ! bravely done ! ”

Of six score men, there was but one
To follow where I led ;
'Twas a daring deed, and cost him dear,
For, as I turn'd my head,
He was writhing 'neath his steed, which lay,
With a broken neck, stone dead.

No time to pause ! for, over the meads,
We swept, with a scent breast high :
Eight more good miles we carried it on,
The gallant hounds and I :

And, when we turn'd him up, my cheer,
Borne on the rising wind,
Came faintly to the straggler's ear,
A long half-league behind.

'Twas a cold November evening ;
And the way was long and dreary,
For, a score of miles before us lay,
And man and horse were weary ;

But my heart was warm as I thought of the smile
That my return would greet,
When *she* heard the story of the day,
With its trophy at her feet.

A RUN WITH "THE QUORN,"

IN THE DAYS OF "THE SQUIRE."

To the Tune of an old Hunting Song.

NEAR Kirby-Gate the gorse we drew :
That a "travelling" fox was there, we knew,
For 'twas own'd by a sportsman staunch and true,
As ever went out in the morning.

"The Squire" was there on his trustiest steed,
The boast of the county for bone and breed ;
Jack Stevens rode his wiry "weed,"
To the cover betimes in the morning.

Her tongue we heard old Prioress throw,
And she never yet spoke false, you know;
Frank Holyoake view'd the "varmint" go,—
 "Tally-ho there, away!" in the morning.

Straight over the pasture-grounds they sail,
But the fences run large in the Leicestershire Vale,
And there's "bellows to mend," and a length'ning
 "tail,"
 Tho' it's early yet in the morning.

Far more select the field has grown,
At the last ox-fence a dozen are down;
But "the Earl" (6) and "the Squire" still hold their
 own,
And "give 'em a lead" in the morning.

The Whissendine Brook ran deep and wide,
But the foremost-flight never turn'd aside;
And six took it fairly in their stride,
With a "For'rard away!" in the morning.

Two hundred started fair and more,
But they all tailed off ere the run was o'er;
And, to see him die, there were but four,
Of all who met in the morning.

But "the Squire" was one; and men have said,
That the tree-tops shook upon Woolwell Head
When his cheer, that told how the fox was dead,
Woke the echoes up in the morning.

O'er ten good miles the chase had past,
You may judge yourselves if the pace was fast,
For 'twas fifty minutes from first to last,
When they turn'd him up in the morning.

When "the Quorn" next meet at Kirby-Gate,
Unless you can "go" when hounds run straight,
You may take my word, for the death you'll be late,
Tho' you start with the first in the morning.

A LEGEND OF GALWAY.

FROM the gorse of Ahaseragh the chase broke away,
With the "grey fox" on foot, and a warm scenting day,
The "cracks" of Roscommon are here, and they swear,
Come life, or come death, to beat Valentine Maher.

He's last thro' the clay and the deep of the vale,
Not seen at the gap in the third post-and-rail,
And, still with the lead, the Roscommons ask "Where
"Is the pride of your county, bold Valentine Maher?"

Then, smiling aside, the old huntsman spoke low,
"With the grey fox on foot, we've a day's work to do,
"You'll have nerves of the strongest, nor steel must you
 spare,
"If you ride to the finish with Valentine Maher."

All the while his fierce chestnut was chafing in vain,
'Till the foam from her nostrils specked breastplate and
rein;
But calm, as at first, "Take your time, never care,
" We'll catch 'em yet, Kathleen!" said Valentine Maher.

They near'd the "Black River," they heard its dull roar,
They mark'd the thick mist-wreaths that brood on its
shore,
When his laugh, from the distance, came ringing and
clear,
"Here's food for the fishes!" quoth Valentine Maher.

While they stood on the bank, and the boldest held breath,
As he gazed on the torrent, three fathoms beneath,
When the best of Roscommon drew rein, in despair,
With a rush to the front came Valentine Maher.

He called upon Kathleen,—one snort and one spring;
She clove thro' the air, like a swallow on wing;
He turn'd in his saddle,—“Now, follow who dare!
“When I ride for my county,” quoth Valentine Maher.

The hounds left the valley, they strain'd up the hill,
But one rider remains, and he sticks to them still;
They check'd on the brow of Kilconnel, and there
To turn them and cast them was Valentine Maher.

Where the coverts of pine over Athenry frown,
Within one mile of home “the grey fox” was pull'd down;
And rock, hill, and valley, sent back the death-cheer,
As they rang to the halloo of Valentine Maher.

So we'll drink with nine cheers to the old county's breed,
To the blood in the veins of both rider and steed ;
And here's — " The next time that Roscommon shall dare
Go straight across Galway with Valentine Maher ! "

THE
LEGEND OF DECIUS.

ARGUMENT.

In the year B.C. 340, Annius of Seta, Prætor of the Latin confederacy, came to Rome to demand a perfect equality of rights between the two nations. The alternative was a rupture of the alliance then subsisting between them. This was refused; and the Latin, in his anger, not only defied the Senate, but blasphemed the Capitoline Jupiter. On leaving the Temple, he missed his footing, and falling down the stone steps leading from the Capitol to the Forum, was killed on the spot. So said the Roman account. Upon this ensued the great Latin war. The Roman Consuls were P. Decius Mus and T. Manlius Torquatus. While the armies were encamped opposite to each other, the Consuls issued an edict that no Roman should engage single-handed with a Latin on pain of death. This was disobeyed by the son of Torquatus, who, being challenged by Mettius Geminus, attacked and slew him. When he returned to the camp, Torquatus caused him instantly to be scourged and beheaded. Soon after, a decisive battle took place at the foot of Vesuvius: when the Romans began to give way, Decius devoted himself and the hostile army (according to an ancient formula) to the Infernal Gods; then he spurred into the midst of the enemy, and was slain. The result was that great victory which established the supremacy of Rome over Middle Italy for ever.

THE COUNCIL.

IN the Curia (7) of Velitræ
The peers of Latium met ;
The lords of thirty cities,
Each in his order set :
From township, too, and hamlet
The grey decurions (8) come,
And half Italia's destiny
Hangs on the question that they try,—
“Is it peace, or war, with Rome?”
The contest of the factions
Rose with the rising sun,
Fiercely it raged, and doubtfully,
When his middle course was won ;
And the Lower Sea (9) blush'd rosy red
Ere the debate was done.

Like Elean wrestlers fairly match'd,
Thro' the long summer's day,
Opposing speakers struggled
The conclave's vote to sway :
Still was it tried ; for neither side
Could win one foot of way ;
'Till rose above the storm of words
One voice deep-toned and clear,
With the clangour of a trumpet-call,
It smote the list'ner's ear,
And each Pancratiast⁽¹⁰⁾ of the tongue
Sat hush'd attent to hear,
While a whisper thro' the benches
Of Velitræ's Curia spread :
" Now, list to Lucius Annius,
The brother of the dead !"
They had glozed all for policy,
With state-craft calm and cold ;
But his accents passionate and strong,
Like a flood of lava rolled along,
Soul-stirring, brief, and bold :

- “ Let the college of pale augurs
 “ Babble of ‘ wrath above,’
“ How Annius perish’d by the bolt
 “ Of Capitolian Jove!
“ And let Rome’s Latin hirelings
 “ Of sign and portent tell:
“ Good faith! they mouth it fairly,
 “ And earn their wages well!
“ But *we* know, ’twas Roman falsehood
 “ Our noble Prætor sped:
“ From the grave he calls us to avenge
 “ His blood, so foully shed:
“ O ye! who follow’d him long ago,
“ When he led us down on the reeling foe,
“ Have your ears and your hearts grown deafer now
 “ To the voice of the martyr’d dead?
“ ’Tis a sounding boast—‘ Quirinus,
 “ ‘ His own will never fail!’
“ But the hoarse waves of Allia⁽¹¹⁾
 “ Murmur a truer tale;
“ And the fresh graves are scarcely green,
 “ In the Vestinian vale.

-
- “ He saw his senate slaughter’d,
“ His city all a-flame,
“ When the Capitol could hardly save
“ The embers of Rome’s name :
“ Sure, none of the immortals
“ Hath been more sorely tried,
“ Yet it wearied not the patience
“ Of the dread Fratrieide ;
“ A lighter insult moved him more
“ On the day when Remus died !
“ Shall we, whose sires were gods and kings,
“ Like herded oxen yield,
“ To the brood of slaves and renegades,
“ Without one stricken field ?
“ Not so :—the fend that we have nursed,
“ So silently and long,
“ Will, in our hour of vengeance,
“ Make nerve and sinew strong.
“ We *may* o’ercome ; we *can* but die,
“ Like men in glorious fight :
“ So,—one bold blow for freedom,
“ And the Gods guard the right !”

No whisper now, but an eager shout
Thro' Velitræ's Curia spread,—
“Right well hath Lucius spoken,
“For the living and the dead!”
His words have roused to daring
Faint hearts that lately quail'd,
And, echoed by the nation's voice,
The vote for war prevail'd.

* * * *

The heralds cross'd the Tiber,
As the sun was going down,
There was joy, as for a victory,
In Rome, when the news was known;
Ere midnight, o'er the Latin bounds,
The Fetial's⁽¹²⁾ lance was thrown.
Uprose the haughty burghers,
In their halls on Palatine,
There was bright'ning of corselets and sharp'ning
of blades,
Where the hardy craftsmen ply their trades,
On the slopes of Aventine;

The ruin'd debtors heard the din,
 Deep down in noisome caves ;
And they who still had silent lain,
Their senses numb with length of pain,
Leapt up in frenzy and rent at their chain,
Muttering curses they knew were vain,—
 (War was not made for slaves) ;
And, as eager footsteps went sounding by,
From the dungeons there rose a wail and a cry,
Might have waked, with it's desp'rate misery,
 The usurers in their graves.

The trumpet sounded as evening closed
 On the fiery Nones⁽¹³⁾ of June,
And, ever since, thro' the city's round,
There hath been a ceaseless, busy sound,
Like distant murmurs of sullen seas,
Or restless hum of lab'ring bees,
 At the sultry hour of noon :
But, chiefest in the Forum,
 Was the tumult and the din,
Where, still to swell the levies,
 Fresh names came pouring in ;

And, ere the third day's dawning,
As the stars began to fade,
On the plain, beyond the Capene Gate,
Six legions stood array'd.

The Samnites, five times vanquished,
And yet half unsubdued,
Now, at their conqu'rors' utmost need,
Forget the ancient feud ;
From many a rock-built eyrie
Pentrian and Daunian come,
The hardy mountain-dwellers,
To lend their swords to Rome.
No foreign hirelings are they,
Whom She must now oppose ;
Nor, elsewhere, 'tween the Double Seas,
Are found such worthy foes :
And She, who brooks no rival,
Nor partner of her throne,
Hath a sharp struggle yet to win,
Or ever she reign alone.

They come not from the Volscian,
False friend and restless thrall ;
Nor from snow-laden forests
Of bleak Transalpine Gaul ;
Nor whence the Umbrian Mountain
O'er Trasimenus lowers ;
Nor whence Tarentum, o'er the tide,
Casts broken shadows far and wide,
From a coronal of towers ;
But warring hosts and rival Gods
Must try, on the battle-day,
If the Seven Hills or Latium
A subject world shall sway ;
And many a soul, from its shatter'd home,
To Lethe's banks shall fleet :
For, 'tis a strife for death and life,
When the Sister-nations meet !

THE BATTLE.

THE cloudy racks drift slowly back
From the Calabrian Hill,
The morn of battle rises
Heavy with mist, and chill,
As if her brows were clouded
With prescience of ill.
There's stir within the Roman camp ;
For a full hour ago,
From tuba and from lituus
The wakening call was blown.
Near the Prætorium's threshold
Gather the Augur's (¹⁴) band,
Where, by two turfen altars,
Tribunes and Consuls stand.

Alone, amidst the shrinking crowd,
Torquatus holds his place ;
Th' Erinnyes (¹⁵), busy in his breast,
Leaves little outward trace
On the features, passionless as steel,
Of the son-slayer's face :
The shades have deepen'd on his cheek,
But he bears him haughtily,
As when he spoke the ruthless word
That gave his first-born to the sword,
And sat to see him die.
Eyes only, in which never sleeps
The red and wolfish glare,
Speak of the heart too strong to break,
That lives, upon it's kind to wreak
The venom of despair ;
The scent of slaughter cheers him now,
And the savage blood mounts to his brow,
As he hears the Augurs say :—
“ With trustful heart, Torquatus,
“ Go forth unto the fray ;
“ The Fates grant half our Founder's prayer,
“ *Thou* shalt o'ercome to-day.”

Meanwhile, on Decius' altar,
Girt by an eager throng,
From quivering entrails, soothsayers try
To draw the rede of destiny,
Good sooth ! they tarry long.
It came, and every listener's pulse
Stood still in prescient fear,
While, with wild eyes and 'bated breath,
He paused, intent to hear
What hath blanched ashen-white the lips
Of the grey Etruscan seer :—
“There is wrath among the nether Gods,
“Hell yawneth for her prey ;
“If our left wing prevail in strife,
“'Twill purchase, with it's leader's life,
“The victory to-day.”
At the fatal word, a shuddering groan
Broke forth from all the crowd,
The veterans, comrades of his wars,
Smote on their bosoms, seam'd with scars,
And wept and wail'd aloud.
The Consul hush'd them with his hand,
As he stood before them all,

The only man of that mighty host,
Tho' the evil presage touch'd him most,
Whom it could not appal :
The colour changed not on his cheek,
Nor shook his steady tone,
While through the ranks, at his earliest word,
There was silence, so deep that you might have
heard,
The matin-song of the neighbouring bird,
Or the west wind's breath, tho' it scarcely stirr'd
Dead leaves that last night it had strown.
And on his lip, like sunlight,
The smile began to play,
That those who knew it said, of yore,
In the hour of triumph, it ever wore,
When the toil of doubtful fight was o'er,
And he felt he had won the day.

“ What mean these murmurs ? shall we pause

“ When the will of Heaven is clear ?

“ Ye must quench its wrath with a richer draught

“ Than the blood of ram or steer ;

- “ Brief will the rites be, for, I ween,
“ The sacrificers’ blades are keen,
“ And the victim’s ready here.
“ Where my white porch crowns the Aventine,
“ My sweet wife bides alone,
“ And loud and long Volumnia prays
“ For her last living son :
“ ’Twill be lonely round that happy hearth,
“ I fear, when I am gone.
“ But Rome ! nor wife, nor mother,
“ Are half so dear as thou ;
“ And by the battles, whose brunt we’ve borne,
“ By the Sacramental ⁽¹⁶⁾ oath we’ve sworn,
“ I will not fail thee now !
“ So, if thy Right wing fail thee,
“ And falter in the fray,
“ Bear bravely up, Torquatus !
“ I’ll aid thee, as I may ;
“ But if, before the Latin,
“ The Left one foot should flee,
“ Heaven help Cornelia ! for that hour,
“ A widow’d wife is she !

“ I shall fall, but as my father fell,
“ As I pray my son may die.
“ For the City’s weal, and the fair fame
“ Of the Publian Decii.”

The sweet smile faded from his face,
As it darken’d to a frown,
For, just where the hill-range join’d the plain,
With a heave in their ranks, like a stormy main,
Standard and spear head glistening bright,
Where their points caught gleams of the freshening
light,
The Latin host came down :
And the long swell of the litui,
Thro’ the morning air arose ;
But there sounded forth no battle cry,
To mark their eager close ;
With teeth hard set and flashing eye,
They met —— the mortal foes.
For a little space, the whirling dust
Hid the fair light of day,

But, as the breeze grew stronger,
It swept the mist away;
And Decius turn'd, from where he fought,
To mark how went the fray:
The foe had borne his legions back
Three spears' length on the field,
E'en, while he gazed, the second rank
Of the Hastats ⁽¹⁷⁾ 'gan to yield:
Vainly, to stem the ebbing war,
Tribune, centurion, consular,
With voice and gesture, tried,
And the flower of th' ancient Houses ⁽¹⁸⁾
In the van of battle died;
These stirred not, dropping in their ranks,
Unyielding, side by side.
So fared the Left—their litui,
That lately swelled so cheerily,
Rang fitfully and wearily,
With a sound like a dying moan;
But on the Right, tho' hard bested,
The Roman yet makes gallant head,
And Manlius holds his own.

Then Decius staid no longer :

He saw the Pontiff⁽¹⁹⁾ ride,

Helmless tho' harmless, thro' the darts,

And called him to his side :

“ Hither, in haste, Valerius

“ Thou seest mine hour is come ;

“ Do thou, as 'fits thine office,

“ Rehearse the words of doom.

“ Comrades ! for your old leader's sake,

“ To the death, this once ! fight on :

“ The curse that hitherto hath lain

“ On your hearts and arms, like a leaden chain,

“ Will be lightened when I'm gone ;

“ And, if ye'd lay mine ashes

“ Where my Fathers sleep in Rome,

“ Come, seek me in yon serried files,

“ And charge the Latin home !”

Then reverently, with steady voice,

He spoke the words of fear ;

His cloak wrapt close around his face,

His bare foot on a spear :—

- “ Sire of our Founder! hearken ;
“ And ye, mysterious Powers,
“ Indigetes, Novensiles !⁽²⁰⁾
“ Whom earth revered as deities
“ In the childhood of the Hours ;
“ And ye, too, who the shadowy tribes
“ Of the pale Manes sway,
“ To whom, at dead of moonless nights,
“ The coal-black steer we slay,
“ Who, in the leaden twilight, dwell
“ Where ninefold Styx, with ambient swell,
“ Girdles the burning marl of Hell,
“ List all ! the while I pray :
“ To you, in meet libation,
“ I shed this blood of mine,
“ As priests, before the sacrifice,
“ Pour out Falernian wine ;
“ Now turn the channel of your wrath,
“ From Rome avert the blow ;
“ But let it fall the heavier
“ On me and on the foe ;
“ And grant that myriads of their dead
“ May follow where I go !”

He spake, and, as he ended,
 Gave his charger spur and rein ;
With his first bound, the Apulian⁽²¹⁾ clear'd
 Three fathoms' length of plain ;
The Latin cower'd before him,
 Like sheep within their fold,
When the wolf of Apennine comes down
 From his lair upon the wold ;
While, even Lucius Annius
 For an instant held his breath,
All guess'd with what intent he came,
 The Messenger of Death.
But, the thought of his dead brother
 Hath waked the Latin's wrath,
So, with set teeth and writhen brow,
 He barr'd the Consul's path :
'Twas a meeting, as of thunder-clouds,
 When they 'counter'd, breast to breast ;
But tho' *his* thrust sped fiercely home,
Before the strongest lance in Rome,
 Down went the Prætor's crest ;
While, all unscathed, his slayer
 Rode onward in his pride ;

The foe, still yielding lightsome room,
Rolled back on either side,
So, cleft by the Liburnian's⁽²²⁾ prow,
Grey Ocean's waves divide ;
But, as the billows silently
Close 'neath the flying stern,
Their ranks, uniting as he past,
Barr'd rescue or return ;
Yet, onward bore the Consul,
'Till he had clov'n his way,
To where "The Cities'"⁽²³⁾ standard
Look'd down upon the fray.
Then thicken'd all around him,
The tumult and the stour,
'Till eager eyes, that track'd his course,
Could follow it no more ;
But, where the swarm was darkest,
Was heard a piercing cry,
The scream of his Apulian steed
In the death agony.
And that one crest, that topp'd the rest,
Sank downward suddenly ;

Still sharper came the hail of steel
On his uncover'd head :
His arm grows faint with slaughter now,
And grasps a broken blade :
A score of spears, thro' gaping wounds,
For the struggling soul gave way,
One shiver of the mighty limbs,—
And a strong heart was clay.
Then a shout burst from a thousand breasts,
As tho' some spell were broken,
Shrill with the trace of recent fright,
Like the cry of sleepers, at dead of night,
From hideous dreams awoken ;
It was answer'd by a growl of wrath,
From the heaving ranks of Rome,
Such murmur, ominous and deep,
Preludes the storm, that soon will sweep,
'Cross Hadria's⁽²⁴⁾ seething foam :
With a crash, as when that whirlwind bursts,
Rome's knights are spurring on ;
Torquatus leads their flashing lines,
While, in his gripe, the broadsword shines,
That the proud Agnomen⁽²⁵⁾ won ;

The blade, beneath whose griding sweep,
The fair-hair'd Giant fell,
Never before this fateful hour,
Hath wrought its work so well.
Tireless, resistless, pitiless,
He clears his desp'rate way,
And, where the torquis on his crest
Gleams, starlike, thro' the fray,
Six times three hundred horsemen
Are following as they may ;
While, thro' the scatter'd maniples⁽²⁶⁾
With spirit fresh and high,
They come to turn the tide of fight,
Rome's proved Triarii.⁽²⁷⁾
Then swell'd, tenfold more furious,
The gath'ring battle's roar,
Like the moan of many prison'd waves,
Whose dungeons are those sunless caves,
That skirt Illyria's shore ;
And, in after song and story,
Were the victors wont to tell,
How those they vanquish'd, to the last,
Fought stubbornly and well.

But the nameless horror of a curse
On the shrinking Latin press'd,
The Roman, mad for vengeance, fought,
Like fiends, or men possess'd :
Little could warlike stratagem,
Or trick of fence avail,
For, when they found, with changing blows,
Pilum and broadsword fail,
They grappled at their foemen's throat,
And rent them, tooth and nail.
Hast seen the pinewoods bending,
That the ridge of Gaurus crown,
When, from the hold of Æolus,
Euroclydon⁽²⁸⁾ comes down ?—
When heavy rains of spring-time,
And tides of melting snow
Bring down, in flood, five fathom deep,
The tawny waves of Po,
Hast seen the reed-beds yielding
That skirt the river's flow ?—
So, bent before their onset,
The centre of the foe.

Five times the line was broken,
Five times the strife renew'd,
And not a foot of ground was won
But paid its price of blood ;
But, while the vanguard struggled,
And hardly held their own,
Rome's horse, thro' their unguarded flank,
With a furious charge, bore down :
And, as thro' broken bank or weir
Gushes the swollen lion,
Torquatus and his riders,
Thro' the gap, came slaughtering in ;
There was one baffled rally,
The last of their despair,
And the Latin broke, and turn'd, and fled,
Leaving their noblest there.
Once, where the pass grew narrow,
The fliers stood at bay,
But the Roman press'd them fierce and fast,
As the pack that seents its prey.
For, where the footmen might not pierce,
The horsemen hew'd their way.

And, louder than the storm of steel,
 One voice was heard and known,
As the Consul, wild with the lust of blood,
 Hounded his legions on :—

“ Dastards ! have ye forgotten,
 “ Whose blood for you was shed ?
“ Before you stands the foeman,—
 “ Beh'nd you lies the dead :
“ Each Latin that outlives to-day,
 “ On your honour is a stain ;
“ Do ye linger ? dare ye falter ?
 “ Hath Decius died in vain ?
“ Where Styx repels the unanneal'd,⁽²⁹⁾
 “ He roams the hither coast,
“ 'Twill need a royal hecatomb
 “ To soothe that sullen ghost ;
“ And whoso to the vanquish'd,
 “ Shall ruth or mercy show,
“ By Pluto ! I will strike him dead,
 “ As I would my mortal foe !”

But their own thoughts bore a sharper sting
Than taunt or threat'ning word,
None stay'd his hand from vengeance,
While it could lift a sword.
Vain was the shriek for mercy,
In the name of friendships⁽³⁰⁾ old ;
(The Present blotted out the Past,)
And vain the proffer'd gold,—
Not one had bought his forfeit life
With the ransom ten times told.
At early dawn, the fight began,
And, all that summer's day,
There was carnage in the troubled heart
Of the mountain-ranges grey ;
The runnels of the blue hill-streams
Were stain'd with curdling red
Each nook of all those quiet dells,
Held its own heap of dead.
Nor ever ceased the slaughter,
Till the night began to fall,
And the sullen note of the litui
Sounded a late recall.

The moon is high on Vesperis,—
 O lonely mountain-river!
How ghastly, in the doubtful light,
 Thy tainted waters quiver!
No marvel, if they curl and shrink,
 The waves of the Lower Sea,
Meeting the load of swollen dead,
 To-night hath laid on thee.

The moon is low on Vesperis,—
 On water, marsh, and plain,
The torches gleam of those that seek
 The self-devoted slain.
A fruitless quest, tho' it began
 With earliest shades of night,
So thickly lie the relics
 Of the nation's mortal fight:
It was at that chill and dreary hour
 That heraldeth the day,
When the darkness deepens blacker,
 Just ere it turns to grey,

That they came where "The Cities'" standard
At yester-morn had stood,
And the red lights glint smoothly back,
From a spreading pool of blood :
There *He* lay,—the dead his pillow,
By the dead, too, overlaid ;
His left-hand griped a Latin's throat,—
His right, a shiver'd blade.
Ev'n as a reaper resteth,
Weary with toil and drought,
By the brown swarths embosom'd,
That his own hand hath wrought.
'Twas not so much the ghastly face
That met the torches' glare,
As the thrill at all their hearts, that told
The search was ended there.
The awe that fell upon them all
Was a strange sight to see,
As they straighten'd ev'ry writhen limb
Gently and tenderly ;
Their rough hands smooth'd his tangled hair,
With gore and dust defiled,

Softly. as watching mothers stroke
The locks of a sleeping child ;
Then they laid his head, where it loved to rest,
In the hollow of his shield,
And the grey dawn's first struggling rays
Lighted upon the rigid face,
As they bare him from the field.

THE FUNERAL.

STILLY above the Seven-hill'd Town,
Broodeth a sultry noon,
Pillar and cornice shimmer white
In the glowing smile of June.
'Twas but yestreen,—the sky was dark,
With thunder-clouds and rain,—
When Manlius, up the Sacred Road,
Pass'd with triumphal train ;
There was a gloom, too, on the faces
Of the dumb and sullen crowd,
And the comrades of his murder'd son
Forbore not curses loud :
Never hath Roman festal
Boasted so scant display ;
There are more to swell the triumph
That the Dead must lead to-day !

Manhood, and age, and childhood,
From far and near have come,
None, save their Household Gods, are left
To guard the hearths of Rome.
With heads bent low, his kinsmen go,
Behind him one by one;
Before they bear the limnings
Of the deeds that he hath done,
With trophies gay and numberless
Of the battles he hath won :
The civic and the mural crown
They bind around his brow,
And sadly snit the sere oak-leaves
With the wither'd cheek below.
When the breeze lifts the sagum, ⁽³¹⁾
And bares his breast to view,
Lo ! where the ancient gashes
Are mingling with the new ;
They are plain to read those records,
Of what for Rome he bore :
With twice ten wounds the corse is mark'd,
And every wound before.

So, ever as the train pass'd on,
 Green laurel-leaves and flowers
From window, door, and house-top,
 On the bier came down in showers :
But onward, still, wound slowly
 The long array of cars,
Till their steps they staid, where the pyre was laid,
 In the great Field of Mars.

The while, Volumnia spake no word,
Nor sob, nor breath, her vesture stirr'd,
 She stood some space apart,
Rigid as marble master-piece
 Of Attic graver's art ;
Out spoke Cæcina's haughty wife—
 (Of the Claudian blood she came,
While others marvell'd silently,
 She only dar'd to blame) :—

“ Now by the great Matuta,⁽³²⁾

 “ I hold it sin and shame,

“That, while there’s grief at all our hearts,
“And tears in ev’ry eye,
“The mother of the dead should stand
“Tearless, and careless by.”

Slow was the hand, and never shook,
That raised the mourner’s veil;
The thousand eyes that met her gaze,
Of ruth, or weakness, found no trace;
Tho’ never yet hath living face,
Been seen so deathly pale;
Her oldest friends knew not her voice,
So alter’d it had grown,—
Words cannot tell the dreariness
Of the shrill, uncertain tone,
Most like the wail of winds, at night,
Thro’ clefts of mouldering stone:—

“There’s iron in *our* blood, men say,
“Who boast the Sergian line,

- “ Rome’s Annals knew it long before
“ The Exile⁽³³⁾ founded thine.
“ We keep the She-wolf’s nature yet,
“ And when the toils are round us set,
“ Die without howl or whine.
“ I tell thee this, when Decius writhed
“ In the agony of death,
“ He felt no sharper pang than mine,
“ When my travail gave him breath.
“ Speak out, I charge thee, Claudia !
“ Wast thou not standing by ?
“ Did all the pains that rent me, then,
“ Force from my breast one cry ?
“ Albeit mine eyes in torture burn’d,
“ They would not shed a tear,
“ When Heaven had listen’d to our vows,
“ And given our House an heir.
“ But, when Lucina⁽³⁴⁾ would have claim’d
“ The groans she holds her due,
“ I clench’d my hands, till the blood sprung out,
“ And bit my closed lips through ;

“ And in this sharper trial,
“ It shall be even so,
“ No pomp of noisy grief from me
“ Shall grace your funeral show.
“ How I lov’d him, how I mourn him,
“ The great Gods know and see ;
“ But the tale of my heart’s bitterness
“ Is not for such as ye.”

Her fierce glance challenged a reply,
But answer came there none ;
As from some ghastly shape that walks
Thro’ grave-yards dark and lone,
The crowd shrank backward from her path,
Spell-bound till she was gone.
Then, as the rite demanded,
With head averted came,
The Gentile⁽³⁵⁾ that was next of blood,
And to the pile set flame ;
The Veterans cast their offerings,
As they circled round the pyre,
Garlands of bays, incense, and arms,
With store of rich attire,

And gems that flash'd with a changeful light,
In the heart of the rising fire :
It's hot breath, for an instant, fann'd
The loose locks of the Dead,
And a crimson tinge, of life-like hue,
On the livid cheek was shed :
Then rising quick and hungrily,
With a rustle and a roar,
The Fire-God, wolf-like, clutch'd his prey ——
The mourners looked no more.
The funeral chorus yet remain'd
Before the rites were done,
It rose upon the summer air
In solemn monotone,
And double flutes chimed in the while
With deep diapasôn.

“ Dost hear us, parted Spirit,
“ Or comes our dirge too late ?
“ For, sounds of earth but faintly pass
“ Elysium's ivory gate,

- “ Ev’n now, with kindly greeting,
“ They gather to thy side,
“ The train of ancient worthies,
“ Who, for Rome, have lived and died ;
“ They lead thee where, from life’s long toil,
“ Their weary limbs rest well,
“ Where soft winds breathe eternal spring,
“ And silvery fountains swell
“ With a musical murmur o’er golden sands,
“ In the meadows of asphodel.
“ Let Latin maids and widows
“ For their dead the moan prolong,
“ Our pride shall cheek the starting tears
“ That do thy glories wrong,
“ And with our nœnia mingle
“ Clear notes of Pæan-song.
“ Not only in an hour like this
“ Would we remember thee ;
“ But, in revel and in battle-field,
“ We’ll guard thy memory ;
“ When we meet our foemen face to face,
“ ’Twill stir our blood to flame,

“And, ’twixt the wine-cup and the lip,
“Shall rise thine honoured name,
“While we pour a deep libation
“To the Tutelars of Rome;
“And, another to the Fateful Three, (³⁶)
“Who days so glorious wove for thee,
“Tho’ they called thee early home.
“Yet, once more, let the double-flutes
“A deeper cadence breathe,
“Till the dead of thrice three thousand years
“Start from their rest beneath.
“O thou! whose praise, yet more than ours,
“The coming age shall tell,—
“Strong arm, brave heart, and subtle brain,
“Receive this last farewell!”

NOTES.

NOTES.

NYMPHOLEPTES.

(¹) *Oread*.—A mountain-nymph.

(²) *Eviar*.—Eviar was one of the many names of Bacchus.

His devotees were called Mænads.

THE RELIQUAIRE.

(³) *The maiden myriad*.—The eleven thousand Virgins, whose relics are still preserved at Cologne.

(4) *Fairy-rings*.—I suppose every one has seen the green circles on old pasture-grounds, that are known by this title.

THE EVE OF BATTLE.

(5) *The soldier's "Iron Bride."*—Theodore Körner uses this image throughout his "Song of the Sword."

A RUN WITH "THE QUORN."

(6) *The "Earl," &c.*—I hope it is not making an invidious distinction to select Lord Wilton and Mr. Osbaldestone as "having the best of it" at this point.

THE LEGEND OF DECIUS.

(7) *Curia*.—The senate-house.

(⁸) *Decurions*.—The delegates from the different towns of the confederacy, representing the “*tiers état*” in the great national assembly.

(⁹) *The Lower Sea*.—The Adriatic and the Gulf of Genoa were called respectively the Upper and Lower Seas.

(¹⁰) *Pancratiast*.—The Pancratium embraced all the five exercises of the Arena, and to attain its perfection was the highest point of athletic excellence.

(¹¹) *Allia*.—On the banks of this river, the Romans met with their decisive defeat from the Gauls.

(¹²) *The Fetial*.—One of the priests of Mars. A preliminary to hostilities was his casting a lance stained with blood over the enemy's frontier. This ceremony precluded further negotiations.

(¹³) *The Nones*.—A division of the Roman calendar. In this month answering to the 5th.

(¹⁴) *The Augurs*.—Before engaging with the enemy, it was customary for the augurs, or soothsayers, to consult the Fates, by examining the entrails of the victims.

(¹⁵) *Erinnys*.—One of the names of the Furies.

(¹⁶) *Sacramental*.—The military oath, taken by each soldier as he was enrolled, was called *Sacramentum*.

(¹⁷) *Hastats*.—The heavy-armed infantry, occupying the second rank in the order of battle.

(¹⁸) “*Houses*.”—This was the distinguishing name of the *Patrician* families.

(¹⁹) *Pontiff*.—The Pontifex Maximus was the chief of the Roman priestly order.

(²⁰) *Indigetes*, *Novensiles*.—These deities belonged to the old Pelasgian or Tyrrhenian mythology.

(²¹) *Apulian*.—This part of Italy was famous for its breed of horses.

(²²) *Liburnian*.—The vessels, so called from the nation who first employed them in piracy, were very light barques, renowned for their swiftness.

(²³) “*The Cities*.”—The Latin confederacy was made up of thirty principal cities.

(²⁴) *Hadria*, *had.* the Adriatic.

(²⁵) *Agnomen*.—This was a title added to a person's other names (*nomen* and *cognomen*), generally in consequence of some great exploit; *e. g.* Manlius was called Torquatus from his having slain in single combat a gigantic Gaul, and taken from him the golden *torquis*, or necklet, that he wore.

(²⁶) *Maniples*.—The small detached bodies into which the Roman battalia was subdivided.

(²⁷) *Triarii*.—These, occupying the *third* rank, were a reserve, composed of tried veterans, and never brought into action but at the last necessity.

(²⁸) *Euroclydon*.—The north-east wind.

(²⁹) *Unannealed*.—Before their funeral rites were performed, the spirits of the dead were not allowed to cross the Stygian ferry.

(³⁰) *Friendships old*.—The Romans and Latins, while allied, had often served in the same army, and on this occasion, Livy tells us, that, while standing opposed to each other in battle array, many knew the faces of their ancient comrades, and saluted them by their names.

(³¹) *Sagum*.—Military cloak.

(³²) *Matuta*.—One of the names of Juno, under which she was specially worshipped by the Roman matrons.

(³³) *The Exile*.—The Claudian family was founded, some time after the building of the City, by Attus Clausus, a Sabine exile.

(³⁴) *Lucina*.—The goddess presiding over *accouchemens*.

(³⁵) *The Gentile*.—The blood-relations belonging to the same “family,” or *gens*, were called *Gentiles*.

(³⁶) *The Fateful Three*.—The *Parcæ* who, like the “Valkhyr” of Scandinavian mythology, were supposed to weave the web of every mortal’s destiny.

[I will take the opportunity of this last note to apologize for having, in “Decius,” annotated things that every “fourth-form” boy knows by heart. My only reason is the hope, that few of my fair readers will be “so deeply, darkly, beautifully blue,” as *not* to require such aid.]

THE END.

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